I'm in control, insists May, as she slaps down 'backseat' Boris

Theresa May is placed on a pedestal so she can stand level with Justin Trudeau, the Canadian Prime Minister, for a photocall (top left) after she arrived in Ottawa, Ontario, yesterday

PM maintains that she is driving talks after Foreign Secretary split Cabinet with his vision for Brexit

By **Christopher Hope** *and* **Steven Swinford**

THERESA MAY insisted yesterday that she was "driving from the front" as she sought to reassert her authority by strengthening her grip on Brexit negotiations.

The Prime Minister rebuked Boris Johnson after he set out his own vision of Brexit in a 4,000-word article in *The Daily Telegraph* last Saturday.

She also refused to endorse the Foreign Secretary's claim that the UK would be able to "take back control" of £350 million a week after Brexit and divert some of the money to the NHS.

She made her comments, while on a trip to Canada, as it emerged that she has appointed Britain's most senior Brexit official as her own EU adviser.

Oliver Robbins has left his role as permanent secretary at the Department for Exiting the European Union after a series of clashes with David Davis, the Brexit Secretary. He will continue in his role as the UK's EU sherpa in the Cabinet Office, where he will report directly to Mrs May in what is seen as a significant blow to Mr Davis.

Yesterday, Mr Johnson refused to deny categorically that he could resign over Brexit amid mounting speculation about his future. Asked if he could quit as Foreign Secretary, he paused before saying that the interviewer was "barking up the wrong tree".

He added: "When the burden of office is lifted from my shoulders I will of course look back with great pride on my time doing all sorts of things."

It came after Mr Johnson's article on Saturday, in which he set out a grand vision for Britain's "glorious" post-Brexit future, provoked significant Cabinet splits. Amber Rudd, the Home Secretary who is viewed as a future candidate for the Tory leadership, subsequently accused Mr Johnson of behaving like a "backseat driver" in Brexit negotiations.

Mrs May moved to make clear that she – and not Mr Johnson – is in charge of the Government's overall policy on withdrawal from the bloc.

Asked if she could "truly" guarantee that she is leading the Brexit process, the Prime Minister said: "This Government is driven from the front and we are all going to the same destination."

Mrs May failed to answer a direct question of whether she thought Mr Johnson would resign over the row.

She said: "We are all agreed as a Government on the importance of ensuring that we get the right deal for Brexit, the right withdrawal arrangements but also the right deep and special partnership for the EU and the UK in the future.

"We are all optimistic about what we might be achieving as the United Kingdom in the future."

She also brushed off suggestions that she was "frustrated" with Mr Johnson, adding: "Boris is Boris."

Mr Johnson's father, Stanley, said yesterday that the Foreign Secretary would be "happy, happy, happy" to quit over Brexit if he felt it was necessary. Meanwhile, Michael Gove, the Environment Secretary who last year ended Mr Johnson's leadership ambitions, publically backed the Foreign Secretary's position on Brexit.

He said: "In the debate on EU contributions it's important people look at what Boris actually wrote in his *Telegraph* article – not headlines .

"[The] debate should be forward-looking on how to make the most of life outside EU – not refighting the referendum."

Speaking as he attended the UN General Assembly in New York, where he met Donald Trump, Mr Johnson reiterated his support for Mrs May.

He said: "As far as backseat driving honesty there is only one driver in this car and it is Theresa. What I am trying to do is sketch out the incredibly exciting landscape of the destination ahead."

Mrs May was yesterday asked about Mr Johnson's controversial claim Britain would "take back control" of £350million a week that is sent to Brussels.

She stressed that any decision on spending priorities had to be taken by the whole Government.

She said: "By definition if we are currently paying money into the European Union and at a point in the future we won't be paying that money into the European Union, we will have to decide as a Government how to spend that money and at the time we will look to see where we think it is appropriate and best to spend that money.

"That will be a decision taken at the time, it will be taken by the Government."

Mrs May was also drawn into an extraordinary row between Mr Johnson and Sir David Norgrove, the head of the UK Statistics Authority, over whether Britain would gain £350million a week from Brexit.

The statistics watchdog rubbished the claim when it was made by the Vote Leave campaign last year, complaining that rebates and EU subsidies meant the net figure was far lower.

Asked "who she trusted to do sums", Mrs May appeared to side with Sir David by pointing out that Britain's net contribution to the EU changed from year to year. She denied that the change in Mr Robbin's position showed that Brexit negotiations are a "shambles".

She said: "No, not at all. What it is a sign of is that the negotiations are getting into a more detailed and more intense phase.

"As a result of that I think it's right that Olly Robbins concentrates on that and obviously a different structure will be put in place in terms of the running of the management of the Department for Exiting the European Union and the permanent secretaryship there."

Timetable

Crucial days ahead for Mrs May

Today
Annual meeting of UN General Assembly in New York. Expected to hold bilateral meetings with Donald Trump and other world leaders

Tomorrow
Addresses the Assembly to stress the need for UN reform

Thursday
Arrives back in Downing Street

Friday
Flies to Florence to set out her vision of post-Brexit Britain

Monday 25
Next round of Brexit talks kick off in Brussels

Sunday Oct 1 - Wednesday 4
Conservative Party conference in Birmingham

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How they compare on the big issues	Boris Johnson	Philip Hammond	Theresa May
Single Market and Customs Union	◆ The Foreign Secretary has said that staying in the Single Market and Customs Union would make a "complete mockery" of Brexit. He opposes continued payments to Brussels for access to the Single Market after a transition period, and has said the UK will be "perfectly OK" if it leaves the EU without a deal.	◆ The Chancellor has committed to leaving the Single Market and Customs Union but has warned that jobs and the economy must come first. He has said it would be "madness" not to seek the "closest possible" arrangement with the EU after Brexit, and that leaving without a deal would be a "bad outcome for Britain".	◆ The Prime Minister has said that Britain "cannot possibly" remain in the Single Market and Customs Union after Brexit. She has said she wanted to "trade with and operate within" the Single Market, and has also said that the UK could leave the EU without a deal, warning Brussels that "no deal is better than a bad deal".
Transition period	◆ The Foreign Secretary has called for the UK to leave the EU with "speed and efficiency", with sources suggesting that he favoured a six-month transition period.	◆ The Chancellor has previously said that he wants a transition period lasting for around two to three years in order to avoid a "cliff-edge" for businesses.	◆ The Prime Minister has repeatedly said that there will need to be an "implementation period" after Brexit but has declined, so far, to say how long it should last.
Brexit divorce bill	◆ Mr Johnson has been forthright on the divorce bill, saying the EU can "go whistle" if it thinks it will get anything like the €100bn some officials are demanding. He has suggested the EU should, in fact, be paying the UK money after Brexit.	◆ The Chancellor has said the UK would "honour" its obligations but rejected claims that it would pay as much as €100bn. When asked earlier this year, he said: "I don't recognise this number, I genuinely don't recognise it."	◆ The Prime Minister has been tight-lipped over the UK's Brexit divorce bill, saying it was a matter for negotiations. Ministers have suggested she may offer to pay a significant bill in a bid to break a deadlock in negotiations.
Trade deal	◆ The Foreign Secretary is said to be opposed to a future trade deal based on membership of the European Economic Area, believing it would tie the UK's hands. He favours a model based on Canada's trade deal to ensure the UK has the freedom to negotiate deals with non-EU countries.	◆ Mr Hammond is said to be in favour of a Swiss-style "EEA-light" deal, which would see the UK shadow the EU's regulatory structures and transpose European Court of Justice rulings. This approach is seen as the best way to ensure "frictionless" free trade.	◆ The Chancellor and other pro-European ministers are reportedly attempting to persuade Mrs May of the need for an "EEA-light" free trade deal, ahead of a landmark speech in Florence on Friday.
Allies	◆ Michael Gove, Priti Patel, Liam Fox, Andrea Leadsom	◆ Amber Rudd, David Gauke, Liz Truss, Jeremy Hunt, Damian Hinds	◆ Damian Green, David Davis, Michael Fallon, Greg Clark, Chris Grayling, David Lidington, Brandon Lewis, Gavin Williamson

MATT

'If I had a penny for every time Boris has misused a statistic, I'd have £350m'

Our financial settlement is significant if we make progress on a trade deal

Comment

By **Shanker Singham**

On Friday, the Prime Minister will make a very important speech in Florence on Britain's approach to Brexit. In her Lancaster House speech on the subject in January, she set out a vision which was achievable, and which could lead to Britain being a powerhouse in the world.

It is crucial as she sets out a new vision in Florence that no future opportunities are taken off the table.

If we lose the opportunities, then Britain will find itself managing a steady decline over the next years and decades as a European vassal state.

A former prime minister, Winston Churchill, standing in a similar place as she does now, called his moment an inflection point between majestic opportunities or catastrophic failure. As a country, we stand at precisely this point once more.

The major opportunities for the UK in the future are being able to execute an independent trade policy; being able to engage in meaningful regulatory reform at home; and being able to play a leading role in international organisations so the overall barriers to UK global trade are minimised.

If we are unable to do these things, then it is unlikely that we will be able to make a success of Brexit and the entire logic for Brexit itself will start to unravel.

If we tie ourselves too closely to an EU moving in an anti-competitive direction such that wealth is destroyed, as I believe it is, our future will be bleak indeed.

On the other hand, if the rest of the world can be made more pro-competitive, more wealth creating, with fewer barriers and distortions, the interests of UK firms and consumers will be served.

The key to making the rest of the world more pro-competitive is UK leadership on trade. The UK could be a global game-changer if it is allowed to be.

Our financial settlement with the EU is a significant part of the leverage we have, and making generous offers as the Prime Minister is expected to do in Florence is a good thing provided that we can make concrete progress with the negotiating of the future trade agreement while we still have this leverage: a real FTA must be clearly on the cards, and lack of cooperation from Brussels should hold up our financial offer.

For our own part, we should agree to an alignment with the EU's Common External Tariff (which does make negotiating our own trade deals elsewhere much harder) – but not beyond December 2020.

On regulation, we should argue for easy regulatory recognition between the two sides from Day One after Brexit.

Such a system would ensure that the UK can inter-operate with other countries while maintaining recognition with the EU. The process of trade liberalisation, so vital for global supply chains, firms and people, has stalled.

'The Florence speech might just be the most important speech of the Prime Minister's tenure so far'

Protectionist measures, especially those that are hidden behind borders, have increased.

Little progress is made for want of leadership.

The UK is the only country that can, because it is the only one that has the necessary combination of economic size, commitment to free trade, a vital and strong services sector and soft-power networks that will be needed to fight successfully for competitive regulation around the world. If Theresa May suggests a future where Britain's ambition is to be a global leader in these areas, she cannot at the same time place a straitjacket around the country by requiring it to ask Brussels for consent to any regulatory divergence, as the Swiss have to do.

She certainly cannot contemplate a future in the EEA, as Norway has.

An interim period, necessary if we have not concluded the terms of our future relationship, must allow us to negotiate with others in a realistic way – not just giving us the legal authority to do so, but making us an attractive and credible negotiating partner.

The Florence speech is a very important speech.

It might just be the most important speech of the Prime Minister's tenure so far.

It will set the tone for our relationship with the EU and the context for our global relationships. Get it wrong and Global Britain will be off the table.

For the future of our country, we must get it right and we must build on and deepen the vision which the Prime Minister laid out so well in her Lancaster House speech in January.

Shanker Singham is chairman of the Legatum Institute Special Trade Commission

Mrs May looking for third way as Cabinet splits on EU deal

Continued from Page 1

and Trade Agreement (Ceta) that removes 98 per cent of trade tariffs.

The Foreign Secretary will meet Mrs May in New York today or tomorrow for a showdown over the content of her Florence speech as they both attend the United Nations General Assembly.

Meanwhile, Dominic Cummings, the former campaign director of Vote Leave and a close friend of Mr Gove, suggested that the Cabinet had been "led like lambs to the slaughter" by Sir Jeremy Heywood, the powerful Cabinet Secretary.

He suggested that backing Mr Johnson and Mr Gove gave Tory MPs "a shot of saving your skins", while backing Mr Hammond meant the Government would be "in dire danger".

But Mrs May said there was a third way that did not involve a Ceta or a Swiss-style deal.

Speaking in Canada, she said: "I don't recognise the simple binary approach. I have always said we are not looking to take a model off the shelf or a relationship that currently exists because the position of the UK is unique.

Lord Hague, the former Tory leader, has warned Mrs May she must unite her Cabinet on Friday

"We are already in the European Union.

"We have the relationship with the EU already and when we come out we want to ensure we can negotiate a good deal, a bespoke deal, a deal that is right for the United Kingdom and that would be in the economic interests of the European Union as well."

Mrs May has invited Mr Johnson, Mr Hammond and Mr Davis to Florence but Mr Johnson has not yet confirmed whether he will accept the invitation.

Boris is indeed Boris, Mrs May. Unstoppable and full of mischief

Sketch

By **Michael Deacon**

Theresa May can hardly complain. Six months ago, she had a majority – and that majority gave her authority.

But then she called a snap election – and both her majority, and her authority, vanished. Had she won by the landslide she expected, no minister would dare poke a toe out of line. But she failed.

And so, when Boris Johnson decided to go public in Saturday's *Telegraph* with his personal vision for Brexit, there was nothing she could do. She couldn't stop him. Nor, it seems, can she punish him.

Yesterday Mrs May flew to Canada for talks with Justin Trudeau, the prime minister with the boy band eyes and Hollywood skin. During the flight, she confirmed that the Foreign Secretary had written his article without her permission.

A journalist asked her how she felt about his actions.

"Boris," she replied thinly, "is Boris." She did not elaborate.

On arrival in Ottawa she held a joint press conference with Mr Trudeau. The BBC's John Pienaar asked whether she would tolerate any more of Mr Johnson's "back seat driving".

Mrs May's features tightened. The Prime Minister is well practised in the art of inscrutable expressions. Jaws clamped together, eyebrows in check.

No flinching, no wincing, no reddening of the cheeks. Her facial discipline, at times like this, is impressive. Her thoughts would have been unreadable, but for the icy glittering of her eyes.

"The UK Government is driven from the front," she said.

"And we all have the same destination in our sights." She did not mention Mr Johnson.

Nor did she refer to him in any of her subsequent answers on Brexit.

In contrast to Mrs May, Mr Trudeau looked supremely untroubled. He spent most of the press conference smiling bashfully, as if each reporter in turn had presented him with a bouquet of flowers.

Over in New York, where the United Nations was preparing to hold its General Assembly, the BBC's James Landale caught up with Mr Johnson. What exactly, Mr Landale asked him, was he up to?

Mr Johnson does not quite share Mrs May's gift for inscrutability. Manfully though he strove to look solemn, an unmistakable flicker of a smile could be seen playing on his lips – as if, just out of shot, a mischievous friend were tickling him with a feather.

"There's only one driver in this car," he insisted. "And that's Theresa," he quickly added.

If Mrs May failed to deliver the Brexit deal he wanted, asked Mr Landale, was he prepared to resign?

"Well, ah, um," replied Mr Johnson. "If I may say, ah, I think you may be barking slightly up the wrong tree here!"

He coughed out a brief laugh. His eyes darted from side to side. He murmured something about the importance of "clarity" for business, and said the Prime Minister very much agreed. The question remained unanswered.

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